



Matthew 13:1–9

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. 2 Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on

rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

Reflection

Our passage begins with the words, ‘That same day,’ and what a day so far! Early on in the day Jesus had healed a man possessed by a demon; the poor man was blind and mute. Now he can see and speak,

and no doubt he's off speaking right now to everyone he can now see about Jesus. But instead of praising God, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law hated Jesus all the more for it. They were jealous of him. The huge crowds that were coming out to hear Jesus preach were no longer listening to them, and so they'd resolved in their hearts to kill him. In fact they'd already tried out one scheme that very day. Their first attempt was accusing Jesus of performing miracles by the power of Satan, a very serious charge, punishable by death.

Yet the only thing more powerful than Jesus' works are his words. Using just words, Jesus put Israel's leaders to shame. He turned the tables on them in proving, to their great shame with vast crowds witnessing the exchange, that it was in fact they who

were in league with the devil. In plotting to kill Jesus they were doing the work of their father, Satan. But they weren't alone in their evil. Some of the biggest towns in the region, Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin had also rejected Jesus. This led Jesus to prophesy earlier in the day that their entire generation was so wicked that on Judgement Day they would face some of the most severe punishment of all.

A big day. And still more to come.

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The house Jesus left was probably Peter and Andrew's house in Capernaum. It was kind of the base for his year of ministry in Galilee. Mobbed by the huge crowds yet again, Jesus gets into a boat just off the shore of the lake so that he can teach them. If you visit Israel today you can go and see the 'Cove of Parables' which is where they think Jesus preached Matthew 13. The land surrounding the cove slopes down to form a natural amphitheatre, providing natural acoustics enough for Jesus' voice to carry about a hundred metres from the boat and to be able to address a crowd of many hundreds on the shoreline. Apparently it still works today, a couple of thousand years on.

But back to our passage. The region's turning their backs on Jesus, preaching the

good news of the kingdom is becoming more dangerous, his time on earth is coming to an end – but they're still coming out in huge numbers to hear him preach. And despite the danger, Jesus still has more to teach his disciples about the kingdom of God; so from now on he will do so in parables. You see parables were a much safer way to teach. Parables were stories, drawn from everyday life, with a hidden spiritual meaning. If you were a member of the kingdom of God or were close to becoming one, you'd understand the parables, or you'd seek out Jesus' disciples or Jesus himself to explain them further. But if you weren't a member of the kingdom of God, or were hostile towards Jesus, you'd simply hear a master story teller tell a story, you'd puzzle over it and probably leave confused, but you'd have no reason to do

any more than that.

From the boat Jesus preaches Matthew 13. Seven parables about the kingdom of God. Across all four gospels Jesus preaches 27 different parables; this one is one of the most famous. Imagine him, seated on the boat, his voice carrying across the water almost miraculously, 100 metres in every direction, speaking these words to hundreds of farmers and day labourers from all over the agricultural region of Galilee. No stuffy theological lecture here, just a powerful story, with a powerful hidden meaning for those who have ‘ears to hear.’ Do you have ears to hear these words from Jesus?

“A farmer went out to sow his seed.
4 As he was scattering the seed,

some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9 Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

What do you think Jesus is talking about here? He’s certainly describing farming practices that many of his hearers could relate to since childhood. What Jesus has just described is known as broadcast sowing.

It involved scattering seeds by hand in all directions as farmers walked up and down the stony paths that divided their fields. And of course Jesus would have used far more words than the short summary in our passage. Farmers would have been nodding their heads, ‘This man knows us, he’s walked a mile in our shoes, he knows exactly what our lives are like, finally someone teaching us in terms that we can understand and relate to – but what on earth does he mean?’

Think

Take what time remains this morning to think over this parable for yourself – we’ll learn more together about it over the coming days. But for now, what is Jesus’ point? To get you started, this parable is about

the kingdom of God. Let's assume Jesus is the sower, and the seed that he is sowing is the gospel, the good news of the kingdom of God. That leaves us with the four soils and the fate of the seed sown into each of those four soils. Four soils: the path; the rocky ground; the ground covered in weeds, and thorns and thistles; and the good soil. What is Jesus teaching those crowds and his disciples and us from this parable about these four soils?

Pray

Then close your time in prayer. Here's a beautiful promise from Isaiah that you might like to claim in your prayer time. It's about the gospel.

10 As the rain and the snow

come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,
11 so is my word that goes out from
my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which
I sent it. Isa 55:10-11

Pray for the gospel this morning, and claim this promise for our world. But as you do, consider it in the light of these four soils. God's word doesn't return empty, it achieves the purpose for which it was sent; what does then mean in the context of the four soils found in our passage today?

Keep thinking, and we'll continue to think about this together tomorrow.